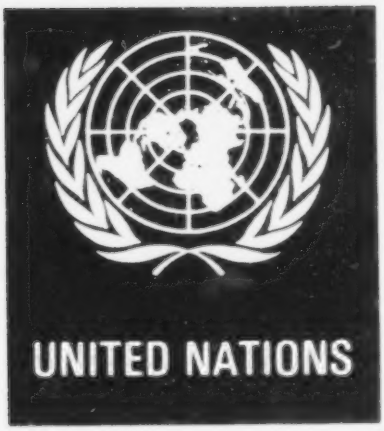

DIVISION FOR
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

UNITED NATIONS
INTERNATIONAL NGO MEETING

and

EUROPEAN NGO SYMPOSIUM
ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

Palais des Nations, Geneva
2-4 September 1996

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The United Nations International NGO Meeting/European NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine was held as a combined event under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, from 2 to 4 September 1996.

2. The meeting was convened in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 50/84 A and B of 15 December 1995, and was attended by 21 panelists and workshop leaders and by the representatives of 80 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), 16 of them as observers. It was also attended by 26 Governments, 9 United Nations agencies and bodies, 3 intergovernmental organizations, 4 NGO coordinating committees and a delegation of Palestine.

3. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was represented by a delegation composed of Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee and head of the delegation; Mr. Ravan A. G. Farhadi (Afghanistan), Vice-Chairman; Mr. Joseph Cassar (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee; Mr. Pedro Núñez-Mosquera (Cuba); and Mr. M. Nasser Al-Kidwa (Palestine).

4. The programme for the meeting was formulated by the Committee taking into account suggestions made by members of the International Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine (ICCP) and the European Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine (ECCP) at the consultations between the Committee and NGO representatives held at New York on 1 and 2 February 1996 and in subsequent consultations with the chairpersons of both the ICCP and ECCP. The central theme of the combined meeting was "Building NGO partnerships for a just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine".

5. At the opening session, a message from Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Secretary-General of the United Nations, was delivered by his representative, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, Under-Secretary-General and Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva. Mr. Ka spoke in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. A statement was made by Mr. As'ad Abdul Rahman, Member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and representative of Palestine. Statements were also made by Mr. Don Betz, Chairman of ICCP, Mr. John Gee, Chairman of ECCP, and Mr. Talal Shubeilat, representative of the League of Arab States.

6. The invited experts made presentations in three plenary sessions, which were followed by discussion. In the first plenary session, entitled "Recent political developments", Mr. Ziad Abu Amr, Member of the Palestinian Council, spoke on the status of the implementation of the concluded agreements; Mr. Azmi Bishara, Member of the Knesset for the National Democratic Assembly, and Mr. Yossi Katz, Member of the Knesset for the Labour Party, spoke on the Israeli elections and Israeli public opinion. Presentations on Arab and international reaction to the recent political developments were made by Mr. Ahmed Hamroush, President of the Egyptian Committee for Solidarity, and Mr. Michael Hindley, Member of the European Parliament for the Socialist Party, United Kingdom.

7. The second plenary session was entitled "Key issues of a just and comprehensive settlement". Presentations on the subtheme "Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory" were made by Mr. Sharif S. Elmusa, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Palestine Studies, Washington, D.C.; Ms. Zahaba Galón, Secretary-General of the Ratz Party in Israel; Mr. Geoffrey Aronson, Editor at the Foundation for Middle East Peace, Washington, D.C., and Mr. Jan de Jong, Geographer and Planning

Consultant at the St. Yves Legal Resource and Development Center, Jerusalem. Mr. Rashid Khalidi, Professor of Middle East History and Director of the Center for International Studies at Chicago University; Mr. Avishai Margalit, Professor of Philosophy at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and Mr. Leonard Hausman, Director of the Institute for Social and Economic Policy in the Middle East of the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, made presentations on the subtheme "Palestine refugees and displaced persons". On the issue of Jerusalem, presentations were made by Mr. Albert Aghazarian, Director for Public Relations, Bir Zeit University, Mr. Gershon Baskin, Co-Director of the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, Jerusalem, Mr. David Andrews, Spokesman for the Fianna Fail for Tourism and Trade, Member of Dail Eriann, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland, and Mr. Giorgos Dimitrakopoulos, Member of the European Parliament for the European People's Party, Greece.

8. The third plenary session was entitled "Building NGO partnerships for a just and comprehensive settlement". Presentations were made by Mr. Marai Abdul Rahman, Secretary-General of the Palestine Committee for NGOs, Director-General of the Arab and International Relations Department of the PLO; Mr. Michael Warschawski, Director of the Alternative Information Center, Jerusalem, Mr. Mustafa Barghouthi, Director of the Health Development Information Project, Jerusalem; Mr. Don Betz, Chairman of the ICCP, and Mr. John Gee, Chairman of the ECCP.

9. In addition to the plenary sessions, a number of workshops were held concurrently for NGO participants interested in developing specific action-oriented proposals. The workshop topics were linked to those addressed in the plenary sessions. Action recommendations emanating from the workshops are summarized in annex II.

10. The participating NGOs adopted a final statement reflecting their sense of the deliberations (see annex I).

II. OPENING STATEMENTS

11. In his message, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Secretary-General of the United Nations, stressed that NGOs had played a major role in informing international public opinion on the question of Palestine. They had been at the forefront of efforts to promote a peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict. NGOs had a long and successful record of providing humanitarian and other assistance to the Palestinian people. The message further stated that recent developments in the region had sparked concern that the peace process, which had produced significant achievements at the end of 1995, might be losing momentum. It was essential that the parties abide by agreements already reached and exert every effort to fulfil the hopes of all peoples in the area that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East might at long last be realized.

12. At the same time, the United Nations continued to attach utmost importance to the promotion of social and economic development in the Palestinian territories, which was essential in order to improve living conditions and to create solid foundations for the achievement of a lasting peace. Real progress in the fields of health and education, development and employment was overdue. The relocation, in July, of the UNRWA main headquarters from Vienna to Gaza should provide an impetus toward meeting those goals, but the United Nations could and should go further. Despite progress in institution-building and the development of vital infrastructure, enormous challenges remained requiring sustained international commitment and action. NGOs had a valuable role to play in promoting greater international cooperation and in delivering real advances on the ground.

13. Further, the Secretary-General regretted that the development effort had suffered setbacks earlier in the year, when the protracted closure of the occupied territories had a damaging impact on the fragile Palestinian economy. Despite the subsequent easing of the closure and the establishment of an emergency employment programme based on a proposal made by the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, economic conditions remained precarious. There was a pressing need for rapid and tangible improvements in the daily lives of Palestinians. He expressed his sincere hope that the parties would resume their dialogue at the earliest possible date with a view to overcoming those pressing problems. The United Nations stood ready to assist that effort in every practical way.

14. **Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka**, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said that, in response to the request made by many NGOs, the Committee had originally decided to hold the International NGO Meeting in the territory under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority. In view of recent developments, however, the Committee had concluded that the restrictions imposed by the Israeli Government on freedom of movement between Gaza and the West Bank would negatively affect the holding of the meeting in Gaza. The choice of Geneva had been made on the basis of that conclusion. He emphasized the Committee's continuing desire to organize an event in the territory under the Palestinian Authority when circumstances permitted.

15. He recalled that the Committee had always worked tirelessly to promote a just and peaceful solution of the Palestine question. As the new Government of Israel took office, the Committee had entertained the hope that it would maintain the momentum of the peace negotiations and respect and implement in full the agreements already reached. Despite the obstacles, the Committee continued to believe that efforts must still be made for the progressive achievement of a just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine, in peace and free from any recurrent violence. In that regard, the Committee attached much importance to the work of the NGO community and he expressed appreciation for the NGOs' committed and unrelenting support for the cause of the Palestinian people. He stressed the need to further the exchange of information between the Division for Palestinian Rights and the NGO constituency and to promote coordination of action between and among NGOs in the various regions and the development of common projects. In conclusion, he emphasized the urgent need to support the fragile achievements of the peace process, and said that the NGO community had the necessary mechanisms in place to assist in that task, making NGOs important partners of the United Nations in its endeavours.

16. **Mr. As'ad Abdul Rahman**, Member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and representative of Palestine at the meeting, conveyed the greetings of Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the PLO and President of the Palestinian Authority, and expressed appreciation for all efforts to build NGO partnerships for a just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine. Voicing concern over recent political developments, he said that it was not only crucial to bring the new Israeli Government to the negotiating table, but also to ensure that it would engage in serious, genuine negotiations that would ultimately lead to the implementation of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Anything less would lead to a continuation of the vicious circle of violence in the area. The PLO would not renegotiate what had already been negotiated. What Palestinians had seen to date gave no grounds for confidence that the present Israeli Government was truly seeking peace, or even seeking to live up to the commitments signed by the previous Government. He recalled that the agreements had been signed in the presence of other international partners who guaranteed their implementation. The NGOs were called upon to approach their work with dedication and resilience, as the future of the peace process as a whole was at stake.

17. He continued by saying that the recognition of the unity of the Palestinian people inside and outside the Palestinian territories was the driving factor of Palestinian national consciousness and identity. The peace process must include the situation of the refugees in the various countries; failure

to do so would jeopardize the credibility of the process and, ultimately, undermine it. He reaffirmed that General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948 constituted the fundamental legal framework for a just solution of the refugee question. At that time, the United States voted in favour of it and Israel implicitly concurred with the resolution. The return of the displaced persons was asserted by Security Council resolution 237 (1967). Continued massive violations of human rights carried out by Israel in particular against the refugee population, as manifested by mass arrests, collective punishment, prolonged curfews, closures of institutions and military aggression in the case of camps in Lebanon, required protective measures by the international community. UNRWA should continue its operation as mandated. There was a need for an interagency programme of action that would address the socio-economic corrective and accompanying measures to bring the economy of the occupied Palestinian territory to the threshold of development.

18. **Mr. Don Betz**, Chairman of the International Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine, said the issue of Palestine had taken many shapes since the International Conference on the Question of Palestine had been held in Geneva in 1983. NGOs had conceptualized their mission as education and advocacy among the peoples and Governments of the world. The people and Governments of the United States and Israel had always remained at the centre of NGO efforts to change minds and to change policies. There had been dramatic changes over the years, and much progress and hope, yet for all that had happened, the NGO mission was not finished. Issues remained unresolved, including the settlements and a genuine cessation of Israeli occupation, refugees, the right of return, Jerusalem and the creation of a Palestinian State.

19. He continued by saying that, lately, there had been little news to foster confidence that genuine progress on those issues had been made or was even possible. The policy announcements by Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu had raised grave concerns about the Government's compliance with commitments made by the Labour Government, commitments guaranteed by the United States in its role as co-sponsor of the peace process. In light of these realities, the international community, including the United Nations and the NGOs, must continue to meet their responsibilities to fulfil the relevant United Nations resolutions pertaining to the question of Palestine. The United States also had voluntarily assumed a special role to broker the peace process, and it was incumbent upon that country to protect the rights and emphasize the responsibilities of the parties to the process in equal measure. NGOs for their part must identify, and call attention to, opportunities for enhanced, balanced initiatives by the United States and Europe. They must never stop reminding everyone that the struggle would not be over until peace with justice rooted in self-determination prevailed.

20. **Mr. John Gee**, Chairman of the European Coordinating Committee of NGOs on the Question of Palestine, stated that the situation in the Middle East had been worsening due to a new Israeli Government that rejected concessions on any and all of the basic Palestinian requirements for a just and lasting peace. At the same time that Government was provocatively promoting the expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank. He said Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu appeared to believe in a dictated peace, in which the Palestinians were expected to accept a settlement completely on Israeli terms, despite international law and United Nations resolutions.

21. The events of the past year had highlighted how much more had to be done to achieve a just and comprehensive settlement. He said that there was a growing sense among NGOs of the need to rebuild their network and to take action in furtherance of the rights of the Palestinian people. The past year had been a difficult one for NGOs, as well, given the difficulty in attracting financial support and commitment. Lately, however, the trend seemed to be reversing, and some successful initiatives had been launched, often aimed at new constituencies. He expressed the hope that the best use would be made of the meeting to launch major efforts on behalf of the rights of Palestinians.

22. **Mr. Talal Shubeilat**, representative of the League of Arab States, said the League was grateful to NGOs for the efforts they were making for a just and equitable peace in the region. The meeting was taking place at a critical time: the Arab countries concerned had committed themselves to the initiatives of land for peace and the fundamental role of international legitimacy, and effective measures had been taken in recent years, despite delaying tactics by Israel to avoid fulfilment of the terms of the peace accords. But the adoption by the new Israeli Government of a policy diametrically opposed to that of its predecessor posed a major challenge to the peace process. The new Government was trying to impose peace without facing the true factors involved. "Peace for peace" would not achieve peace or increase security in the region. The Israeli Government was refusing to carry out its commitments as made in the Oslo accords. Both sides had to live up to their commitments, and a just peace meant that both sides had to make concessions. Israel was making a serious mistake if it felt it could achieve peace without giving Palestinians their just rights and their true capital of Jerusalem. The NGOs had an important role to play, and he encouraged them in their efforts.

III. PLENARY SESSIONS

Plenary session i. Recent political developments

1. The status of the implementation of the concluded agreements

23. **Mr. Ziad Abu Amr**, Professor at Bir Zeit University and member of the Palestinian Council, said that after the signing of the Declaration of Principles in September 1993, the world had assumed that a new era had begun in the Middle East, that the peace process was going in the right direction and that it was, perhaps, irreversible. The suicide attacks by Hamas militants in early 1996 had marked a first turning point deadlocking the peace process. The context for that violence had been created by the Israeli Government earlier by not appreciating the aspiration of the Palestinians in the autonomous areas to implement all terms of the interim agreements and to start the permanent status negotiations. He expressed the view that the Palestinians had accepted the unfair conditions of the interim agreements in order to reach the point of permanent status negotiations. The Government of Prime Minister Shimon Peres, however, had failed to redeploy its military forces in the area of Hebron as well as in additional areas in the West Bank, had not released all Palestinian political prisoners, and had not opened and operated a safe passage for the Palestinians between the West Bank and Gaza. The continued closure imposed on the West Bank and Gaza and the severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods were causing serious problems and hardship for the Palestinians in these areas. He stressed that the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza were not yet enjoying the expected fruits of peace, either politically or economically.

24. The victory of the Likud in the Israeli elections had marked a setback to the peace process. The pronouncements of the new Government contradicted the spirit and the letter of the agreements signed by Israel and the PLO. Disregarding the terms of reference in those agreements, the new Israeli Government rejected the principle of "land for peace", which was the cornerstone of the peace process; its position on Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the occupied territories was a stark violation of agreed positions. It refused to negotiate on Jerusalem and created new facts on the ground, and it allowed the resumption of settlement activities, thus prejudicing the outcome of the permanent status negotiations. Those policies would not only lead to a collapse of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, but were bound to have an adverse impact on relations between Israel and other Arab States with whom Israel sought cooperation. The stagnation of the peace process was also endangering the evolution of a Palestinian democracy, creating a gap between the Authority and the increasingly alienated Palestinian population. He emphasized, in conclusion, that peace in the Middle East was a matter of international concern and that the international community should exercise pressure on whoever tried to jeopardize the peace process.

2. Israeli elections and Israeli public opinion

25. **Mr. Azmi Bishara**, Member of the Knesset for the National Democratic Assembly, pointed out that the Likud Government in Israel had no concept of peace with the Palestinians, it had nothing to offer in the permanent status negotiations, especially on the issue of the West Bank. In contrast, the Labour Government had had a model for peace, unacceptable for many Palestinians, but the Palestinian leadership had a recognized status in that concept it could live with. The new Israeli Government had offered a different reading of the Oslo accords, thus emphasizing the deficiencies of those accords and their lack of final goals that would be binding for any government in Israel. The balance of power allowed Israel to impose its interpretation in any matter of dispute in the Oslo agreement. Referring to the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, he indicated similarities and differences in the approach of Labour and Likud. Whereas Labour did not intend to dismantle the settlements, Likud intended to expand them using the bypass roads built by the previous Government to complete the "Bantustanization" of the Palestinian territory and to turn it into a full-scale apartheid. At the same time, Likud was in a better position to make gestures to the world, to free some Palestinian prisoners or to issue more work permits to Palestinians to work in Israel.

26. He criticized the Arab media, including the Palestinian information policy, for focusing public opinion on the so-called three crucial tests for the Likud, i.e. the Orient House, a meeting between the Israeli and the Palestinian leaders and the redeployment in Hebron. In his view, those could easily be solved by gestures. Instead, public opinion should watch whether the Jewish settlement in Hebron would expand, whether the Judaization of Jerusalem would be enforced and what the results of a summit meeting would be. Arab information policy should focus on the permanent status issues, sovereignty, land, settlements, refugees and Jerusalem where the Likud Government had nothing to offer.

27. He expressed the view that a future confrontation with the new Israeli Government was inevitable and pointed to three factors of strength Palestinians should take advantage of. Arab and international solidarity might play a crucial role in forcing concessions, as brought about by Egyptian diplomacy. The Palestinians should be helpful in uniting the Arab world to isolate the Likud Government. The empowerment of Palestinian society and institutions was another decisive way to employ Palestinian capacities in the confrontation with Israel. Democratization was no longer an internal issue, but a necessity to face the challenges of the permanent status negotiations. Referring to incidents in Palestinian prisons, he expressed concern for the future of democracy. The third factor of power was the strong opposition in Israel itself against the Likud Government which needed to be organized and mobilized.

28. **Mr. Yossi Katz**, Member of the Knesset representing the Labour Party, said that it was too early after the stunning results of the Israeli elections to forecast the effects of the change of government on the peace process. A Labour Government would ultimately have led to peace based on mutual respect between two peoples. He expressed his personal conviction that the Palestinians had a right to self-determination and to a state of their own. The Israeli people, however, had made its democratic choice and it had to be respected. The elections had proved that Israeli public opinion was split equally on the issue of the peace process. Many thought that the Labour Government had gone too far too fast, and that perhaps a Likud Government would succeed in extracting a better political settlement from the standpoint of Israel's security. He stressed that the catastrophic situation in the territories, which might undermine any chance of orderly and positive negotiations, was of great concern to many Israelis, and to all supporters of the peace process.

29. He then analysed the first weeks of the new Government and pointed out that Prime Minister Netanyahu was under greater pressure than any Israeli statesman had ever had to face. On the one hand, he was tied to his electoral statements and undertakings to his right-wing supporters, on the other, the reality on the ground and international pressure dictated that he act differently and against his convictions. Mr. Katz pointed to a number of positive moves of the new Government, such as meetings of cabinet members with Palestinian leaders and a general commitment to the Oslo agreements. But there were many negative developments, such as the decision to reinforce the settlements, the continuing closure of the territories, the delay in withdrawing from Hebron and the political pressure on Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem. The conclusion to be drawn from all that was that Prime Minister Netanyahu had not decided on his policy. But time was running out. Although there was a crisis in relations between the new Government and its Palestinian partners, the Palestinian leadership must not give up, public opinion would not tolerate the failure of the Oslo initiative.

3. Arab and international reaction to the recent political developments

30. **Mr. Ahmad Hamroush**, President of the Egyptian Committee for Solidarity, emphasized that with the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991, peace had become a strategic choice that would require patience and wisdom. Since then, much progress had been made, raising many hopes. The region, however, had entered a period of change that began with the onset of the trend towards extremism and terrorism hostile to the peace process, as exemplified by the assassination of Yitzak Rabin by Israeli extremists and the launching of suicide missions by Hamas. He pointed out some crucial mistakes by the Government of Shimon Peres, such as the Qana incident in Lebanon, failures on the Israeli-Syrian negotiations track and the blockade of the West Bank and Gaza, that ultimately led to the loss of the elections. The elections in Israel had brought about a sharp change in Israeli attitudes and the secular orientation of the Labour Party and of the supporters of peace had receded as a result.

31. The changes in Israel led to the revitalization of inter-Arab solidarity, as demonstrated by the Arab Summit Conference convened in Cairo. The Arab summit had stressed the strategic choice of peace. In a departure from earlier summits, when a combative position had been taken in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, all the Arab leaders had declared their commitment to peace. They had agreed on the need to consolidate the steps already taken towards dealing with Israel and to link their advance with the steps taken by the Israeli Government in the peace process. Also, the European Union had declared its support for the continuation of the peace process on the basis of the agreed upon principles. The position of the United States, however, had been ambiguous and inconsistent with its role as a sponsor of peace. It had declared its commitment to the agreed positions, while choosing to ignore the rejectionist statements of the new Government. The renewed United States support for the Government of Prime Minister Netanyahu in connection with Israel's abundant and sophisticated conventional weaponry and enormous nuclear arsenal was expected to shape the policy of the Israeli Government in the forthcoming period and would require a new approach by the Palestinian people living in the occupied territories, by Arab public opinion and Arab Governments, as well as by the pro-peace forces inside Israel itself to counteract those trends.

32. Mr. Hamroush went on to say that a major role should be played by NGOs; they must make a greater effort to work together for the maintenance of the peace process, to identify and oppose the forces that were hostile to the process and to build new bridges to other NGOs in Europe, the United States and other parts of the world with a view to convening an international NGO conference, held under United Nations auspices and attended by prominent organizations and personalities, in order to rescue peace in the Middle East region. Palestinian groups must strive to reach mutual understanding and to coordinate their action in order to create a common vision and establish a single position in

confronting the Israeli Government. Also, the pro-peace forces inside Israel must play a more vigorous role in uniting the people in favour of peace.

33. **Mr. Michael Hindley**, Socialist Party, United Kingdom, and Member of the European Parliament, emphasized at the outset that Europe could play a helpful role in the Middle East peace process only if the limitations of the European Union's potential were understood. A European role independent of the United States was unrealistic. The European Union (EU) influenced the process through its bilateral relations with Israel, by its own diplomacy and political initiatives as well as by humanitarian aid and, more indirectly, through its overall Mediterranean policy, the MEDA Programme. The example of the financial protocol between the EU and Israel showed the ability of the European Parliament to exert pressure on the Israeli Government. He reviewed relations between the EU, Israel and the Palestinian Authority, including humanitarian, diplomatic, and economic aid, and gave an account of the peace process from the Gulf War through the Oslo accords, the Barcelona conference and more recent events. He criticized the ongoing inability of the EU to develop a common foreign policy that could be executed in a decisive manner. The EU could act to distribute aid, it could help significantly in reconstruction in a peaceful situation, but it had tremendous difficulties to intervene to achieve peace.

34. He continued by saying that a proposed agreement between the European Commission and the Palestinian Authority was aimed at enabling integration of the Palestinians as full-fledged partners in the Euro-Mediterranean area launched by the Barcelona declaration signed in November 1995. That agreement would take into account the Palestinian specificity and in particular the special legal status of the Palestinian Authority. In a joint statement, the European leaders had appealed to Israel and its Arab neighbours to resume peace negotiations on the whole range of disputes, including Jerusalem.

Plenary session ii. Key issues of a just and comprehensive settlement

1. Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory

35. **Mr. Sharif S. Elmusa**, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Palestine Studies, Washington, D.C., reviewed the role of land and water in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and negotiations. He said that water had patterned and sustained the process of Jewish settlement for decades and thus provided a new angle from which to view the still ongoing process of transformation of the Palestinian territory into an ever-expanding Jewish State. The issues of land and water were closely linked; the presence of water resources in particular territory aided Israeli settlement endeavours, and the takeover of territory had often led to the appropriation of the respective water resources. Water was one of the main issues slated for resolution in the final status talks between the Israelis and Palestinians. Currently, water use by Israelis was heavy and growing, for example, settlements in the Jordan Valley alone, whose Jewish population numbered only a few thousand, used about one third of the amount of water allocated for the more than 1 million Palestinians in the West Bank. Israel had been able, by virtue of its occupation of the Palestinian territory, to impose stringent restrictions on Palestinian access to water resources. Domestic water supply for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza remained substandard, intermittent and unreliable.

36. He emphasized that water had been a crucial factor in the choice of Jewish settlement areas and in the construction of symbolic, founding myths. It helped in the population dispersion and the integration of the north and south of the Israeli State. Infrastructural linkages rendered the settlements part of a wider context and created a web that would be hard to dismantle. While Israel was able to integrate its land and water resources, the Palestinians saw the two resources as disconnected. The water situation in Gaza was particularly harsh: water supply was only possible from Israel or the West Bank. Its physical separation from the West Bank left Gaza with water supply options vulnerable

to Israeli dictate. He stressed that securing a State's water resources in accordance with international water law should be done through negotiations and agreement, not through the occupation of territory. There was a worry that after religious, security and hydrologists' concerns were taken into account, Israel's territorial concessions to the Palestinians might leave a West Bank fragment that was tattered, insecure and dry.

37. **Ms. Zahaba Galón**, Secretary-General of the Ratz Party in Israel, and founding member of B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, said that Israeli settlements in the occupied territories had always been a major obstacle to peace; they symbolized the worst of the expansion policy of Israel and deprived the Palestinians of achieving their right to constitute a sovereign State in their land and of conducting their lives without intervention. They also inhibited any possibility of coexistence between the two peoples. She pointed out that the new Israeli Government had chosen to strengthen the settlements at the expense of continuing the peace process. Furthermore, settlements were appealing to the ordinary Israelis, because of the financial assistance given to them by all Israeli Governments since 1967, which reduced the cost of housing for many Israelis and improved their standard of living.

38. She criticized the Oslo agreements for not raising the issue of settlements and for allowing the Labour Government to continue their expansion. She said that the number of settlers in the occupied territories was still marginal, and that the majority of them would return to Israel, if they received adequate financial incentives. Labour could have started that process and could have withdrawn the settlers from Hebron, but it had failed to do so. The main obstacle to a solution of that question was that the settlements had become a high priority in the Israeli national agenda. The right-wing forces in Israel had succeeded in highly politicizing the issue, which would make a rapid political solution impossible. A second, more optimistic scenario was that the Likud Government, which in the past had been more successful in compromising, might change its course and agree to dismantle the settlements.

39. **Mr. Geoffrey Aronson**, Editor in the Foundation for Middle East Peace, Washington, D.C., stated that Likud's ideological foundations were Israel's right to rule over "Greater Israel" between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, the right of Jewish people to settle throughout that area, and a relationship with the Arab world based upon Israel's superior military power. He went on to say that Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu believed in a demonstration of Israeli power in its relations with the leadership of its Arab neighbours, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Palestinians in particular. The new Government had not decided yet if it would continue the "strategic partnership" with Yasser Arafat and more specific, discreet actions directed against the Palestinian leadership seemed likely. In his analysis, Mr. Netanyahu believed that the Oslo II agreement marked the end of any land concessions to the Palestinians, and not the beginning, and that his Government would prefer to continue quietly, as did Labour, the expansion of settlements.

40. Analysing Likud's and Labour's positions on settlements, he said that both had historically considered settlements as an act of peace, as a central element in forcing Arab reconciliation to the fact of Jewish sovereignty in Palestine. Under the Oslo formula, settlements and peace were not irreconcilable objectives. In his view, the Oslo understandings established Palestinian recognition of settlements as an integral element of Israeli policy in the occupied territories. They became the centrepiece of Israel's claim to exercise strategic control of the entire area. The election of the new Government in Israel and its changed approach to the peace process would enable the Palestinian leadership to analyse the impact of the settlement policy and, if necessary, to review its stand. Labour's success had been in convincing or forcing the Palestinian Authority to accept that peace and settlements were not mutually exclusive objectives. The new Government, however, was not interested in addressing that question at all, but would openly continue the expansion of settlements, without any concern for Palestinian positions.

41. **Mr. Jan de Jong**, Geographer and Planning Consultant with St. Yves Legal Resource and Development Centre, Jerusalem, gave an audiovisual presentation indicating, through maps, how the areas of Arab and Israeli sovereignty in the Palestinian territories were established, beginning with 1967 and continuing into the future if current settlement patterns and plans for expanding the area under the Palestinian Authority were carried out, or if alternative schemes were followed. He said that metropolitan development around Jerusalem was being reviewed and prospects for diversified economic growth discussed, as current, predominantly agricultural activities would not be capable of supporting the rapidly growing Palestinian population. Proposed future metropolitan schemes for Jerusalem were detailed, showing Palestinian districts and anticipated Israeli sectors, and including economic zones intended to provide employment for Palestinians. He also showed the possible impact of water supplies, along with the effects of previously planned bypass roads to Israeli settlements, if they were built.

2. Palestine refugees and displaced persons

42. **Mr. Leonard J. Hausman**, Director of the Institute for Social and Economic Policy in the Middle East, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, emphasized in his paper that peace in the Middle East would not endure without a solution to the Palestine refugee question. Harvard University, with the participation of Palestinian, Israeli and Jordanian social scientists, was working on a project aiming to reach consensus on the essential facts of the refugee problem and to analyse alternative options for resolving it. He said that, beginning with the Camp David agreements, a series of historic events had opened a window of opportunity for the permanent solution of the Palestine refugee problem. The main objective of the Harvard Refugee Project was to provide empirical evidence on the economic and social underpinnings of the problem, to measure the various costs and benefits of particular solutions, and thus to facilitate the formal negotiations.

43. Outlining a first approach to a plan, he expressed the view that the PLO, with its signature of the Oslo agreements and the altering of its charter, had traded the Palestinian people's claims to residing in the State of Israel for the opportunity to create the State of Palestine. Only a very limited number of refugees would be able, under a family-reunification programme, to return to their homes, now in Israel. The refugee problem would have to be solved largely within the territory under the Palestinian Authority and Jordan. The main challenge would be that of turning refugees into citizens and absorbing refugees into the Palestinian economy at low adjustment costs, which meant that refugee camps must be converted into normal towns. Depending on the Palestinian Authority's capacity to create jobs, the process of return would be gradual over a likely period of 10 years. He added that the project viewed "return" and "reparations" as separable matters and that resources from international donors to provide compensation were very limited. Stressing the importance for the whole region, he said that an important ingredient for resolving the Palestinian refugee problem was the return of Palestinian workers as commuters in the Israeli economy.

44. **Mr. Rashid Khalidi**, Professor of Middle East History, Director of the Center for International Studies, University of Chicago, said that of all the issues which must be resolved for a settlement of the question of Palestine, probably the most basic and difficult to resolve was that of Palestinians who became refugees in 1948, more than half the population at the time, and the related problem of those who became displaced persons after the 1967. History could not be swept under the rug in the rush to an expedient solution which corresponded to the unequal balance of forces between Palestinians and Israelis. Real history had been almost totally ignored in efforts to achieve a settlement thus far, which was part of the reason that reconciliation had not yet really started in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; real reconciliation could only begin when there was acceptance of the weight of history. He recalled General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, which set forth a clear basis for the settlement of the refugee question. For several decades, its simple formula had been reiterated

annually by the Assembly. He criticized the United States for having allowed that resolution and others to fall into oblivion by changing the issue to one of "negotiations between the parties", thus abandoning long-standing commitments. Consequently, the balance of forces overwhelmingly favourable to Israel would determine the outcome, rather than international law. Any such settlement would not have a chance to be a lasting one. He still favoured the use of that resolution as the basis of a settlement, despite numerous difficulties, because it constituted a recognition in principle of the wrong done five decades ago, by both Israel and the world community. The resolution of the Palestine refugee issue must be grounded in the difficult process of acceptance of the truth. Citing the examples of South Africa and German-Jewish relations, he stressed that besides justice, truth and reconciliation were needed most.

45. In response to a previous speaker, he criticized the approach by the Harvard group of shifting from a general recognition of the right of return as included in resolution 194 (III) to a right of return to the territories under the Palestinian Authority. He questioned the interpretation of the Oslo agreements as if the PLO had traded the Palestinian people's claim to live in the State of Israel for the creation of a Palestinian State of their own. He emphasized that the right of return must apply to the entirety of mandated Palestine. He also criticized the separation of the right of return from reparations in the Harvard approach, which he described as a dangerous route not leading to a permanent solution of the question.

46. **Mr. Avishai Margalit**, Professor of Philosophy, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, said he was concerned that negotiations seemed to have changed from peace talks in the strong sense, aimed at a true goal, to negotiations in a weak sense, merely out of fear of war. He did not feel the aim of the new Israeli Government was really peace. Talks would go on, even the refugees would be discussed, but it would be a "peace process" in an empty sense. The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians was intercommunal strife, there was history, honour and humiliation involved. The matter was deep and intractable. Many Israelis thought there was no way Arabs would accept a just peace with Israel, because Arabs thought the very existence of Israel was an injustice. He himself thought that a "just peace" was a contradiction, if there was justice, there would be no peace, and that was partly because of the problem of justice for the refugees. The humiliation of the refugees, those in the camps, who had decided to stay there and not to integrate into the Arab world or resettle in other ways, was the hard core of the issue. Between them and the Israelis there was a major disagreement about history and narrative. It was very difficult to create a common narrative acceptable to the two communities.

3. Jerusalem

47. **Mr. David Andrews**, Member of Parliament and former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland, said that he believed the solution of the Palestinian question was now possible and would be achieved. The settlement of the question would provide the example necessary to address the problem of Northern Ireland. He had been struck by the similarities between the issues of the minority population of part of the island of Ireland and that of Palestinians in Israel and, in particular, Palestinians in Jerusalem. It was his hope that the sharing of experience at such a level was a key to unlocking closed minds and to offering real and practical alternatives to perceived fixed positions. What was needed was an unswerving commitment to build upon the progress made to date. It was necessary to learn from history and act on that knowledge. All sides must remain committed to a peaceful settlement of the issue. The new Israeli Government must confirm that they had neither short- or long-term interest in ruling Palestinians. Fresh thinking on the issue of national sovereignty was needed in the Middle East; voluntary limitations of national sovereignty could be seen in many multilateral treaties governing human rights and arms limitation. He emphasized that a new Middle East must embrace large-scale mutual disarmament if the region was to redeploy and exploit the natural wealth which existed. Peaceful co-existence should be based on parity of esteem and economic, social and political

cooperation based on mutual self-interest. Maintenance of peace must be viewed in the light of politics and economies, rather than military strength. Economic stability was the first step in the direction of a lasting peace.

48. He expressed a distinct unease as to the manner in which the agreed upon principles were being interpreted by the present Israeli Government, and stressed that the international community should warn Israel of the consequences. With regard to Jerusalem, he said that the Israeli solution was to permit freedom of access to all people, while maintaining Israeli control. Such a system was essentially undemocratic, a visitation of continued political intransigence and likely to be condemned not only by the Palestinians, but by the wider international community. A more balanced approach would involve the application of ordinary democratic principles, like the establishment of a local government as a result of municipal elections, with clearly defined areas of responsibility. He concluded by saying that it was for the international community to persuade the present Israeli Government that their present path was wrong, that it would lead only to a continuation of the conflict that has dogged the lives of Jews and Arabs alike for generations and would do nothing to further the economic and social development of Israel.

49. **Mr. Albert Aghazarian**, Director of Public Relations of Bir Zeit University, recalled that Jerusalem had been the central issue in the Israeli election campaign. The slogan "not to redivide Jerusalem" could not hide the fact that the City was more divided than ever. It had two separate education systems, two bus systems, two electricity systems. There was no real communication between East and West Jerusalem. A unification of the City would be possible only with the participation of the Palestinians. For the last 30 years, the City had seen only unilateral, hegemonic decisions, that had been imposed on the inhabitants. He pointed out that the large expansion of the City had been carried out very carefully to get the maximum of land with a minimum of Palestinian population. Highways, green areas, public works had been carried out in such a way that they deprived Palestinians of land. In addition, official population figures excluded hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Attempts to destroy the complexity and history of the City, and its complex culture, would not succeed, as there would always be some who would resist.

50. **Mr. Gershon Baskin**, Co-Director of the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, Jerusalem, emphasized at the outset that without some Israeli concessions to the Palestinians in regard to their political rights in Jerusalem, there would be no Middle East peace. The new Israeli Government built its policy on what it considered the national consensus on Jerusalem, namely that all of Jerusalem was Israel's "eternal, undivided capital" and must remain forever under Israeli sovereignty. However, if Israelis were given the possibility to voice their true opinions on Jerusalem, it would become quite clear that large sectors of the public recognized that Jerusalem was a very divided City and that talk of a united Jerusalem was perhaps wishful thinking. It was time for Israeli leaders in the peace camp to shape public opinion and to help Israelis understand that eventually, inevitably, Jerusalem would be shared. Jerusalem would be the capital of two States; it could continue to be the capital of Israel and at the same time the capital of Palestine without harming in any way Israel's interests in the City. As the capital of both countries, Jerusalem would finally be recognized by the world as the seat of Israel's Government.

51. In his view, the true Israeli consensus included that Jerusalem should never be physically divided. It must remain an open City with free access throughout its boundaries for all. Personal security and security of property must be guaranteed for all in all parts of the City. The new Jewish neighbourhoods built in East Jerusalem after 1967 must remain under Israeli sovereignty and the Jewish Holy Places must remain under Israeli control. He said that Jerusalem could stay physically united, and that infrastructures, economic development and some elements of planning could be conducted jointly. He called on Israelis and Palestinians to act together, speak out together, meet, demonstrate and lobby together for a united shared Jerusalem. That campaign should be waged by the masses, not by elite groups. He criticized the Palestinian position regarding Jerusalem, in particular,

the political boycott that had allowed Israel to make all the unilateral decisions. There was no Palestinian coherent strategy for insuring their rights in the City. Palestinian Jerusalemites had been too passive for too long. The struggle for Jerusalem must emanate from the Palestinian neighbourhoods and villages of Jerusalem, the key was mass participation. In his view, political participation should take place on three levels, namely the Palestinian Council, the Israeli Jerusalem municipality, and democratic political bodies to be elected in every neighbourhood and village of East Jerusalem.

52. **Mr. Giorgos Dimitrakopoulos**, of the European People's Party, Greece, Member of the European Parliament and Vice-President of the Parliamentary Association for Euro-Arab Cooperation, said that with regard to the status and future of Jerusalem, Rome could serve as a model, being capital of the Italian State and also capital of the Vatican. It was indeed necessary for the Israelis and the Palestinians to begin to see how they could agree on certain principles involving Jerusalem, such as that of a shared capital. Once that was accomplished, they could negotiate the details. He said that currently, too much of the political power in the Middle East rested with the United States, which despite its might simply did not understand the situation very well. The acts of the new Israeli Government also hinted that it did not understand the situation, but he suspected that was more of a case of not wanting to understand the situation. The continuation of the peace process had to take into account the economic situation in the Middle East, other countries such as the Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon and Jordan, and organizations such as Hezbollah. The European Union was most active in the region, but, unfortunately, almost only on the economic level, with minimum political influence, a situation that had to be corrected. He suggested that the European Parliament should get more involved in the peace process, especially on the issue of Jerusalem. The MEDA programme was the right tool to implement some of the European proposals not only in the economic, but also the political field.

Plenary session iii. <u>Building NGO partnerships for a just and comprehensive settlement</u>

<u>Defining priorities and implementing action plans</u>

53. **Mr. Marai Abdul Rahman**, Secretary-General of the Palestine Committee for NGOs and Director-General of the Arab and International Relations Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), said that the present Israeli Government was refusing to honour the international agreements signed between the PLO and the previous Israeli Government and was openly advocating the establishment of more settlements and the adoption of the philosophy of a Greater Israel. The policy of that Government would lead to the collapse of the current peace process and would push the region into violence. Extremist elements in Israel had exerted and gained a measure of influence. The slow and hesitant implementation of that agreement by a wavering Government had been a major factor in the division and polarization of the Israeli society and had pushed it towards greater extremism and fear of the peace process. The Labour Party had lacked a unified and cohesive strategy for the peace process, including the ultimate goal of the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. Moreover, the Israeli industrial establishment linked to the military industrial establishment in the United States favoured tensions and wars.

54. He continued by saying that the most dangerous feature of the present Israeli Government was that it basically represented Israeli fundamentalism in all its various religious and secular aspects, while ruling a State that possessed a nuclear and chemical arsenal. He stressed that the United Nations had a political and moral responsibility to halt the deterioration, put the peace process back on course and insure international protection for the Palestinian people. The reinvigoration and development of the international solidarity movement with the Palestinian people was particularly important. Palestinian and Israeli forces in favour of peace should unite their endeavours. Arab NGOs must once again play

an important role in furthering solidarity with the Palestinian people and in developing the official Arab position with regard to the peace process.

55. **Mr. Michael Warschawski**, Director of the Alternative Information Center, Jerusalem, said that despite recent obstacles, he expected the peace process to continue, because the situation in the Middle East demanded it and because it was in the long-term interests of the United States and Israel, and because Israel needed peace for economic reasons. The fact that a right-wing Government now was in power in Israel could actually help the Palestinian cause, because it was drawing attention to the ongoing establishment of settlements in the occupied territory and other negative Israeli activities. Resistance inside and outside of Israel and greater solidarity among NGOs could be the result, and that would be a beneficial reaction. The NGO community, which was not bound by the negotiating process, had the privilege of being led by principles of justice, and it must emphasize those principles; it should call continuously for Israel to live up to the agreements it had already signed; it should build connections to mass organizations such as political parties, churches, and civil rights groups. It should also establish task forces around priority projects such as refugee issues and the question of Jerusalem so that efficiency and coordination could be improved.

56. **Mr. Mustafa Barghouthi**, President of the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees and representative of the Health Development Information project, stated at the outset that the euphoria of the Palestinian people had given way to frustration, discouragement, pessimism and even alienation. The continued unprecedented closure of the occupied territories had revealed the nature of the Oslo agreements, the power of the Israelis and the powerlessness of the Palestinians. Israel was able to prove to its public that it remained, even with the Oslo agreements, in complete control of the West Bank. Israel had returned to its old ways of trying to solve a political problem through military means. At the same time, the polarization of the Palestinian population was deepening. The policies of the Palestinian Authority had marginalized those forces of civil society that could have acted as a counterweight to the Islamic organizations. As donors had shifted funds from NGOs to the Authority, the service of secular organizations to the people had declined dramatically, resulting in the strengthening of Hamas' social network. He said that with no democratic civil society to act as a moderating force, the Palestinian Authority was more vulnerable to pressures to violate human rights, including carrying out, under Israeli pressure, arbitrary arrests and trials. Palestinians were very sensitive to human rights violations and those incidents would result in the shrinking of popular support for the peace process.

57. He then analysed the role of the newly elected Palestinian Council, expressing the hope that it would become an important tool for the participatory process. However, he said that there had been certain indications that the role of the Council could be marginalized and diluted through the confusion of mandates among different structures and the creation of parallel bodies. He indicated that large areas of crucial importance to the Palestinian people appeared to have been removed from the purview of the elected Council. He referred to the failure of Israel to implement all terms of the agreements, like the release of prisoners and detainees, and the redeployment in Hebron, and stressed that the denial of free passage between the West Bank and Gaza was particularly damaging. It split the Palestinian Authority into parallel bodies and with all its negative economic effects it greatly complicated the work of civil society institutions, and challenged the unity of the Palestinian people and the territorial integrity of the West Bank and Gaza. Lasting peace would require appropriate agreements that assured not only Israeli security but also Palestinian self-determination and statehood. Economic growth and investment were as important for a solution as the development of Palestinian democracy, the creation of accountable and transparent government institutions.

58. **Mr. Don Betz**, Chairman of the International Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine, said NGOs operating outside of the area had a major role to play and had done so for 14 years. Such NGOs perhaps did not have much money, but they had a great deal of determination and were not going to give up. The procedures for exchanging information between the United Nations

and NGOs active on the question of Palestine needed to be reviewed and adjusted, and he requested suggestions on how to do that. Moreover, the entire relationship between the United Nations and the NGOs regarding Palestine needed to be renewed and adjusted constantly to make sure it was as effective as possible. It also was important for NGOs attending meetings such as this to follow up on the contacts they had made and the ideas they had. It was easy to go home and get caught up in other priorities and not take advantage of opportunities for better work and coordination.

59. **Mr. John Gee**, Chairman of the European Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine, said that if NGOs worked together, sharing their resources and seeking to achieve agreed common goals, they could accomplish a great deal. It was best to seek agreement on a limited number of objectives that could be pursued wholeheartedly and to decide on what should be done to achieve them. Refugees and the right of return, the future of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, Palestinian self-determination and statehood, and the release of Palestinian prisoners should be the focus of NGO efforts because these issues were of greatest concern to Palestinians. Development NGOs sometimes had trouble agreeing on approaches, but it should be possible for both political and development NGOs, to carry out awareness-raising campaigns in their home countries and to make their Governments aware of the main issues.

60. The International Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine and regional coordinating committees could act as centres for exchanging information and ideas, but they needed resources and financial contributions from NGOs. They could also play a limited role in coordinating work. He called upon NGOs to consider the formation of national platforms of pro-Palestinian NGOs, which had proved very successful in countries like France, Spain or Norway. It was also necessary to strengthen links between NGOs in the Palestinian territories and Israel and those elsewhere in the world. Through media work and speaking tours, the issue of the refugees and the right of return could be supported. On Jerusalem, not only the individual Governments and international institutions should be pressed to take a stronger line, but more ties between NGOs and governmental organizations in the home countries and Palestinian NGOs functioning in Jerusalem should be encouraged. The issue of settlements should be the object of campaigns, both directly and in connection with fund-raising for development projects in the Palestinian territory. The moment had to be seized to rebuild and expand the NGO network and to reach out to a broader public.

IV. CLOSING STATEMENTS

61. **Mr. Don Betz**, Chairman of the International Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine, read out the final statement of the International NGO Meeting/European NGO Symposium as prepared by the drafting group in consultation with the delegation of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. He expressed on behalf of the NGOs his appreciation for the organization of a successful meeting and stressed the commitment of the NGOs working on the question of Palestine until a just and lasting solution had been achieved.

62. **Mr. John Gee**, Chairman of the European Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine, expressed appreciation for the high level of the speakers' presentations and the deliberations during the meeting and stressed the importance of concrete NGO action to meet the challenges of the future. The ECCP would increase its activities and would put special emphasis on its coordinating function between the European organizations.

63. **Mr. As'ad Abdul Rahman**, Member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and representative of Palestine at the meeting, thanked the participating NGOs for their dedication, sympathy, support and original ideas with regard to a just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine. He emphasized that the Palestinian question and the Arab-Israeli conflict as a

whole were at one of its most serious crossroads. The continued Israeli violations of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people caused a highly volatile situation, creating acute economic deprivation, social alienation and humiliation, as well as political frustration. There was the danger of an eruption of a new wave of violence which might put an end to the possibility of a peaceful settlement. NGOs should spare no efforts to persuade or press the new Israeli Government to comply with all the agreements.

64. **Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka**, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, recalled that the Committee would have preferred to hold the meeting in Gaza, both as a sign of solidarity with the Palestinian institutions and their nation-building efforts, and as an expression of hope in the further progress of the peace process. He voiced concern over uncompromising statements by the new Israeli Government that were followed by actions which only exacerbated the situation, in particular with regard to Jerusalem and its holy places, and the issues of land confiscation and settlement, against a background of delay in the implementation of key provisions in the agreements reached between Israel and the PLO. The serious situation with regard to the peace process and the economic development of the occupied territories called for renewed and intensified commitment by the international community as a whole, including the NGOs. There was a great need for sustained campaigns to inform public opinion and to promote national and international action in support of the effective implementation of the agreements, and of a just and comprehensive peace in the region. The Committee, whose mandate continued to be of great importance, believed strongly that NGOs could make a constructive contribution to those objectives.

ANNEX I

Statement

1. We, the non-governmental organizations gathered together at the United Nations International NGO Meeting and European NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine, are aware that this is an important moment in the history of the Palestinian people.

2. We have welcomed the positive developments associated with the Middle East peace process, but note with great concern the repeated delays in the implementation in the letter and spirit of the agreements. Specifically, we believe that certain measures by the Israeli Government have created new, significant obstacles for the peace process. Israeli actions undermine confidence and generate insecurity among the Palestinian people and pose a genuine threat to securing a just and lasting peace.

3. Unequivocal NGO support for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, the right of return and to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital in accordance with all relevant United Nations resolutions remains at the centre of our NGO commitment. Further, we believe that the United Nations has a key role to play in reaching a negotiated settlement on the question of Palestine and is the most appropriate body to guarantee a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

4. Although the resolution of the questions relating to Jerusalem, Israeli settlements and the right of return has been deferred to the permanent status negotiations, we NGOs clearly reaffirm their fundamental importance to any just and lasting peace. We firmly oppose any Israeli action designed to predetermine the final outcome of the talks. These permanent status issues must be resolved on the basis of the various United Nations resolutions, and of justice and international law.

5. We call upon all NGOs to make concerted efforts to publicize any Israeli violation of Palestinian human rights. Of continuing and major concern to us is the ongoing incarceration of Palestinian prisoners and detainees. We reiterate our call for their unconditional release in compliance with relevant agreements reached between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Further, we declare that, as NGOs, we have an obligation to lobby our Governments regarding these concerns.

6. We note with great concern the intimidation and closure of Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem. As in the past, we condemn this practice which endangers the peace process and call upon all NGOs to register their strongest protests with their Governments and with the Government of Israel.

7. We request that the countries hosting Palestinian refugees observe and preserve their civil, social and political rights until they are allowed to exercise their right of return. NGOs should make special efforts to aid Palestinian refugees in these areas and to publicize their status and demands.

8. We urge the development of Israeli-Palestinian NGO cooperation. It should be based on mutual understanding and a commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. This cooperation is important to the peace process and the Palestinian quest for self-determination. Fresh initiatives to achieve this goal should be undertaken.

9. We strongly denounce the continuous acts of intimidation, humiliation and punishment by Israel against Palestinians. Such actions include the closure of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, travel restrictions, hampering of freedom of worship and movement and the ability to deliver needed

supplies and necessities, in particular, the free movement of goods and people between Gaza and the West Bank, which is vital to the social and economic development of the Palestinian people. These are examples of multiple and persistent Israeli restrictions which abuse economic devastation, waste of resources and disrupt the daily lives of Palestinians as well as the work of international and Palestinian NGOs.

10. We NGOs call on the international community to fulfil the commitments undertaken to assist the Palestinian people's effort in nation-building and political, economic as well as social development in order to minimize the economic and social impact of Israeli restrictive measures.

11. We NGOs request the international community, and in particular the United States and the European Union, to urge Israel to comply with all its obligations under the Declaration of Principles and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip and to observe its obligations as imposed by international treaties, conventions and United Nations resolutions. As NGOs, we continue to uphold the principle that Israel, as the occupying Power, remains obligated to observe the Fourth Geneva Convention until such time as the Palestinian people has achieved full sovereignty.

12. We NGOs, engaged in helping the process of building the Palestinian State, congratulate the Palestinian Authority for the conduct of the first elections. We reaffirm our support of the consolidation of the rule of law, democratic values, political pluralism and the full enjoyment of all inalienable rights by the Palestinian people.

13. In keeping with the theme of this year's meeting, the ICCP and ECCP intend to use this coming year to appraise the ways and means they can be most effective in assisting the Palestinian people in realizing their national objectives. Specifically, we will seek to generate public support internationally for the Palestinian people through campaigns around the themes of the future of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements and their expansion in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza and the Palestinian refugees' right of return. We will review our cooperative relationships with one another, the other coordinating bodies as well as our working relationship with the United Nations Committee and Division with the clear aim of creating stronger partnerships.

14. We warmly thank the Committee for convening this combined meeting and symposium. We genuinely appreciate the work done by the Division and the conference staff in facilitating our sessions. We acknowledge and appreciate the messages of support from the President of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, and the United Nations Secretary-General. We further appreciate the statements supporting the NGO movement and activities made by the Chairman of the Committee, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka. We affirm our interest in continuing and expanding NGO cooperation with the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Division for Palestinian Rights. We request the Committee's and Division's assistance in accessing other United Nations agencies and in identifying United Nations programme and resources that can assist the NGOs in realizing their objectives.

15. We respectfully request the Chairman of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to convey this communiqué to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session as part of the Committee's report.

ANNEX II

Recommendations of the workshops

Four workshops were held, two of them combined, on the following themes: settlements; Jerusalem; the situation of refugees; promoting NGO coordination and action; and cooperation between the United Nations and other international bodies and the NGO community. The workshops provided an opportunity for NGO participants to discuss among themselves in greater depth and in an informal setting the presentations made in the plenaries. The workshops were moderated by members of the ICCP and the ECCP; several panelists served as resource persons. The main purpose of the workshops was to develop action proposals and strategies to be carried out by the NGO community on the specific issues under consideration at the meeting. Action recommendations were submitted by all four workshops in their reports to the plenary and are summarized below:

Settlements

- NGOs should become more active on the vital issue of settlements. Specific information from, for example, the Foundation for Middle East Peace in Washington or the Israeli magazine Challenge could be used to educate the public and to mobilize NGOs and the public for specific action; NGOs should organize campaigns around slogans such as "Stop the Settlements!";

- The question of the settlements should be the focus of activities worldwide. For example, 30 March 1997, Land Day, could be adopted by the NGO network to focus on settlements. This campaign could be led by Palestinian-Israeli NGOs and supported globally through the NGO coordinating committees and the United Nations Committee and Division;

- The NGOs should develop a more comprehensive and effective communication system among themselves and others. Other strategies would include the establishment of a worldwide web site for the NGO network and the update of all mailing, fax and e-mail lists.

- NGOs were urged to cooperate in the support of study tours to the region focused on the reality of the settlements.

Jerusalem

- NGOs should support institutions in East Jerusalem which have played a leading role in the peace process - in particular the Orient House;

- An international campaign should be initiated by Palestinian and international NGOs to further raise awareness of the situation in East Jerusalem;

- Coordination between international NGOs and Arab NGOs should be strengthened; and the ICCP, ECCP and other similar international committees must be more active and coordinated in their work to mobilize the international community on the situation in Jerusalem.

Refugees

- NGOs invited the PLO to communicate to the NGO networks detailed studies presenting its official stand and relevant data on the refugee issue, in order to assist the NGOs in lobbying their respective Governments with authoritative information.

NGO coordination and action

- NGOs should endeavour to develop national platforms where they do not already exist as they are very useful for promoting NGO coordination and action;

- The regional level of coordination among NGOs should be strengthened;

- Campaigns on the local, national, regional and international levels should be organized around specific issues, e.g., the thirtieth anniversary of the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem in 1997; plans for new settlements outside Jerusalem near Bethlehem; worldwide action on Land Day on the issue of settlements; and the commemoration of Palestinian Prisoner's Day on 17 April and the International Day of Solidarity on 29 November;

- International NGOs in Geneva should coordinate their work to ensure that the Palestinian issue is incorporated into the United Nations machinery and existing NGO networks on relevant issues;

- NGOs should plan on sending fact-finding delegations to the Palestinian territories to raise international awareness, in coordination with local Palestinian NGOs;

- NGOs should produce a single video on the issues of Jerusalem, refugees and settlements that could be effectively used in various countries;

- To improve liaison, NGOs should take advantage of the Internet/e-mail as well as directories available and new ones being published to include lists of Palestinian and international NGOs working on the question; the ICCP should distribute lists of network addresses and other material;

- There should be a division of labour among NGOs, in particular Palestinian NGOs, to avoid duplication and to provide specialized information;

- NGOs should study Israeli violations of United Nations resolutions and human rights and publicize them;

- Training should be given to NGOs on mechanisms of the United Nations system and procedures of United Nations conferences so that they can participate more effectively. Training could include offering internships for NGOs and publishing and widely distributing publications that explain technical aspects of United Nations processes;

- NGOs should strengthen their efforts to influence official and public opinion in the United States and Israel.

ANNEX III

List of participants and observers

NGO participants

AFRICAN SOCIETY OAU NATIONAL COMMITTEE
Cairo

AFRO ASIAN PEOPLE'S SOLIDARITY ORGANIZATION (AAPSO)
Cairo

AIDE SANITAIRE SUISSE AUX PALESTINIENS
Geneva

ARAB LAWYERS UNION
Geneva

ARAB ORGANIZATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
Geneva

ARAB STUDIES SOCIETY
West Bank, Jerusalem

ASSOCIATION DE COOPÉRATION FRANCO-PALESTINIENNE
St. Paul, France

ASSOCIATION PAYS DE LOIRE - GAZA JERUSALEM
St. Antoine, France

ASSOCIATION SUISSE/PALESTINE
Begnin, Switzerland

CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS
Vatican City

CENTRALE SANITAIRE SUISSE CERN
Cern, Switzerland

CENTRO ITALIANO PER LA PACE IN MEDIO ORIENTE (CIPMO)
Milan, Italy

CHURCH OF HUMANISM
New York

CITÉS UNIES FRANCE
Paris

COMITÉ CATHOLIQUE CONTRE LA FAIM ET POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT
Paris

COMMISSION OF CHURCHES ON INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS - THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
Geneva

CONFEDERACIÓN PALESTINA DE LATINOAMÉRICA Y CARIBE
Santiago

DEMOCRATIC FRONT OF PEACE AND EQUALITY
Tel Aviv

DEUTSCH-PALASTINENSISCHE GESELLSCHAFT
Berlin

EGYPTIAN PEACE COMMITTEE
Giza, Egypt

FEDERACIÓN DE ENTIDADES ÁRABES DE PERÚ
Lima

FEDERACIÓN PALESTINA DE CHILE
Santiago

FEDERACIÓN PALESTINA DEL PERÚ
Lima

FRENCH NGO PLATFORM FOR PALESTINE
Paris

GENERAL UNION OF PALESTINIAN STUDENTS
Gaza

GESELLSCHAFTSANALYSE UND POLITISCHE BILDUNG E.V.
Berlin

GREEK COMMITTEE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC SOLIDARITY
Athens

HEALTH DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION PROJECT
West Bank

INDO ARAB ISLAMIC ASSOCIATION (INDIA)
New Delhi

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC MIGRATION COMMISSION
Geneva

INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS
Geneva

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HUMANITARIAN LAW
Geneva

INTERNATIONAL JEWISH PEACE UNION
Paris

INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR THE RIGHTS AND LIBERATION OF PEOPLES (LIDLIP)
Rome

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION
Geneva

INTERNATIONAL SERVICE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
Geneva

INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SCIENCE COUNCIL
Paris

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH AND STUDENT MOVEMENT FOR THE UNITED NATIONS (ISMUN)
Geneva

JORDAN MEDICAL AID FOR PALESTINIANS
Amman

LA COMUNIDAD
Buenos Aires

MEDICAL AID FOR PALESTINIANS (MAP)
London

NAJDEH-SOZIALE HILFSORGANIZATION FÜR DIE PALASTINENSEN
Hannover, Germany

NORD SUD XXI
Geneva

NORWEGIAN PEOPLE'S AID
Oslo

PALESTINE COMMITTEE OF NORWAY
Oslo

PALESTINE GROUPS OF NORWAY
Oslo

PALESTINE RED CRESCENT SOCIETY (PRCS)
West Bank

PALESTINIAN AGRICULTURAL RELIEF COMMITTEE
West Bank, Jerusalem

PALESTINIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
Gaza

PALESTINIAN HUMAN RIGHTS INFORMATION CENTRE
Jerusalem

PANORAMA - Center for Dissemination of Alternative Information
Jerusalem

PAX CHRISTI INTERNATIONAL
Geneva

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)
Kentucky, USA

SAVE THE CHILDREN FUND - UK
London

SOKA GAKKAI INTERNATIONAL (SGI)
Geneva

SPANISH NGOs COMMITTEE ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE
Madrid

UMNO YOUTH
Kuala Lumpur

UNION OF PALESTINIAN MEDICAL RELIEF COMMITTEES
West Bank, Gaza

UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION OF EGYPT
Cairo

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION
Paris

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE AND FREEDOM
Geneva

WORLD FEDERATION OF DEMOCRATIC YOUTH
Budapest

WORLD FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS
Prague

WORLD FEDERATION OF UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATIONS
Geneva

WORLD MUSLIM CONGRESS
Geneva

WORLD PEACE COUNCIL
Helsinki

WORLD VISION INTERNATIONAL
Geneva

WORLD YWCA
Geneva

NGO observers

AFRICAN COMMISSION OF HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROMOTERS
Geneva

ALL INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE
New Delhi

ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DES UNIVERSITÉS DU TROISIÈME AGE
Geneva

CUIDADANOS DEL MUNDO
Madrid

EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL
Brussels

FONDATION GIPRI INSTITUT INTERNATIONAL DE RECHERCHES POUR LA PAIX
Geneva

GAZA CENTER FOR RIGHTS AND LAW
Gaza

GENERAL ARAB WOMEN'S FOUNDATION
Geneva

GENERAL UNION OF PALESTINIAN STUDENTS
Gaza

HELLENIC RED CROSS
Geneva

INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION (IPU)
Geneva

LUTFIA RABBANI FOUNDATION
The Hague

MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES
Athens

PALESTINIAN ASSOCIATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
Gaza

PALESTINIAN CENTER FOR MICROPROJECTS DEVELOPMENT
Gaza

Panelists and workshop resource persons

Mr. Marai Abdul Rahman, Secretary-General, Palestine Committee for NGOs; Director-General, Arab and International Relations Department, Palestine Liberation Organization

Mr. Albert Aghazarian, Director, Public Relations, Bir Zeit University

Mr. Ziad Abu Amr, Member, Palestinian Council

Mr. David Andrews, Spokesman for the Fianna Fail for Tourism and Trade; Member, Dail Eireann; former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ireland

Mr. Geoffrey Aronson, Foundation for Middle East Peace, Washington, D.C.

Mr. Mustafa Barghouthi, The Health Development Information Project, Jerusalem

Mr. Gershon Baskin, Director, Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, Jerusalem

Mr. Don Betz, Chairman, International Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine

Mr. Azmi Bishara, National Democratic Assembly; Member of the Knesset

Mr. Giorgos Dimitrakopoulos, The European People's Party, Greece; Vice-President, Parliamentary Association for Euro-Arab Cooperation; Member of the European Parliament

Mr. Jan de Jong, Geographer, Planning Consultant, St. Yves Legal Resource and Development Center, Jerusalem

Mr. Sharif S. Elmusa, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Palestine Studies, Washington, D.C.

Ms. Zahaba Galón, Secretary-General of the Ratz Party; Founding Member of B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories

Mr. John Gee, Chairman, European Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine

Mr. Ahmed Hamroush, President, Egyptian Committee for Solidarity

Mr. Leonard J. Hausman, Director, Institute for Social and Economic Policy in the Middle East, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

Mr. Michael Hindley, Socialist Party, United Kingdom; Member of the European Parliament

Mr. Yossi Katz, Labour Party, Member of the Knesset

Mr. Rashid Khalidi, Professor of Middle East History, Director of the Center for International Studies, University of Chicago

Mr. Avishai Margalit, Professor of Philosophy, Hebrew University, Jerusalem

Mr. Michael Warschawski, Director, Alternative Information Center, Jerusalem

Coordinating Committees for NGOs on the Question of Palestine

INTERNATIONAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR NGOS ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE	Don Betz K. M. Khan Jean-Marie Lambert
EUROPEAN COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR NGOS ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE	Anne Sunde

Delegation of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka
Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations
Chairman of the Committee and Head of the Delegation

Mr. Ravan A. G. Farhadi
Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations
Vice-Chairman of the Committee

Mr. Joseph Cassar
Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations
Rapporteur of the Committee

Mr. Pedro Núñez-Mosquera
Deputy Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations

Mr. Nasser M. Al-Kidwa
Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations

Governments

Afghanistan
Algeria
Austria
Brazil
Chile
Colombia
France
Germany
Greece
India
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Japan
Jordan
Morocco
Norway
Pakistan
Poland
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
South Africa
Switzerland
Thailand
Tunisia
Ukraine
Uruguay
Viet Nam

United Nations bodies and specialized agencies

Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (UNSCO)

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

United Nations Development Programme/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP)

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

World Health Organization (WHO)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

Intergovernmental organizations

Council of Europe/North-South Center

League of Arab States

Organization of the Islamic Conference

Other organizations having received a standing invitation to participate as observers in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly and maintaining permanent offices at Headquarters

Palestine